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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 001922

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PHUM KISL PGOV BG BG

SUBJECT: AHMADIYAS ALLEGE JI BEHIND LATEST VIOLENCE

REF: DHAKA 01853

Classified By: P/E Counselor D.C. McCullough, reason para 1.4 b, d.

1. (C) Summary. After the recent anti-Ahmadiya attacks, Ambassador paid a well-publicized visit to the Ahmadiya central mosque to underscore USG support for the security and rights of Ahmadiyas. Ahmadiya leaders now say that Jamaat Islami was behind the attacks, which might explain why the BDG appears to have backtracked on its commitment to protect Ahmadiyas from extremists. End Summary.

2. (C) Following the recent upsurge of violence against Ahmadiyas in several parts of Bangladesh (reftel), Ambassador, accompanied by IO, met with Ahmadiya leaders on April 20 at their Dhaka headquarters to demonstrate USG support and concern. The BDG, the Ahmadiyas said, had stepped up their efforts in late 2004 to protect them, but is now backtracking in a renewed bid to pander to extremist sentiment and influence. The BDG effectively sanctioned the recent attacks when it allegedly instructed police and local officials to rescind their ban on demonstrations and allow them to go forward. The Ahmadiyas called for equal protection under the law and full freedom of religion. The BDG, they added, should remove the provocative signboards posted at their mosques by police in Khulna and Bogra, and bring to justice those responsible for the violence.

3. (C) Ambassador reiterated the USG's strong support for freedom of religion, minority rights, and due process, and undertook to convey the Ahmadiyas' grievances to Washington.

4. (SBU) On April 22, local officials in Satkhira denied to reporters that there had been any attacks on Ahmadiyas in their areas. On the same day, leaders of the Khatme Nabuwat Movement, which spearheads the anti-Ahmadiya campaign, claimed that the Ahmadiyas were the perpetrators, not the victims, of the violence.

5. (C) On April 25, we asked Mobashsher Ali, deputy leader of Ahmadiya Jamaat, about his press statement the day before alleging that Jamaat Islami (JI), a key member of the ruling coalition, was behind the new attacks. Asked for details, he said the BNP is trying to solidify its Islamist political support for the general election expected in early 2007. He complained that the Awami League, which had sometimes publicly stood by the Ahmadiyas, is now maintaining a conspicuous silence. (Note: At an April 25 lunch, AL leader Kazi Zafarullah told us the AL stands squarely with the Ahmadiyas but that he would raise the issue of a statement with Sheikh Hasina.) The Khatme Nabuwat, Ali said, could never muster 10,000 demonstrators without JI support.

6. (C) Abdul Awwal Khan Chowdhury, an Ahmadiya missionary referred to us by Ali, told us that he had just spent eight days in Satkhira, and was certain that the violence could not have occurred without JI's "green signal." The local MP, Gazi Nazrul Islam, is from JI and was in town on the day of the demonstration to meet with shrimp factory workers. A shrimp union unit chief, and JI activist, was allegedly one of the demonstration organizers. MP Islam could have stopped the demonstration, Chowdhury said, but took no action to do so. He also claimed that a local official offered the Ahmadiyas protection in return for removing the Ahmadiya sign from the mosque after he had met with JI and BNP leaders.

7. (SBU) On April 25, JI publicly denied any involvement with the Ahmadiya violence.

8. (C) Comment: Local media continue to give the issue broad coverage, with the English-language press being generally critical of the attacks and the BDG's failure to stop them. Denials of involvement may reflect some sensitivity to this criticism and the Ambassador's public show of support for the Ahmadiyas. The Ahmadiyas' evidence of JI complicity in the violence seems shaky but is worrisome since, if true, it would represent an escalation in the anti-Ahmadiya campaign and could explain the apparent erosion of the BDG's commitment to protect Ahmadiyas from extremists. JI leaders make little effort to hide their disdain for Ahmadiyas as

"false" Muslims, but they have always insisted that they had nothing to do with the violence or the campaign to declare Ahmadiyas non-Muslims. The openly extremist IOJ, the other Islamist coalition partner which recently split into a third faction, has been the public champion of that effort.

CHAMMAS